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PP RUEHCN RUEHGH  
DE RUEHBJ #4176 3340553  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 300553Z NOV 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2558  
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY  
INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 7207  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 6523  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 7564  
RUEHGX/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 1917  
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 6104  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8516  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1459

UNCLAS BEIJING 024176

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DEPT PASS USTR FOR KARESH, A. ROSENBERG, MCCARTIN  
LABOR FOR ILAB AND MHSA  
TREAS FOR OASIA/ISA-CUSHMAN  
USDOC FOR 4420/ITA/MAC/MCQUEEN  
GENEVA FOR CHAMBERLIN

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EMIN](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: Work Safety Minister Publicly Denounces  
Local Government Officials and Mine Owners Over Mine  
Deaths

Ref: Beijing 23804

¶1. (U) According to the State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS) 3,726 coal mine workers died in mine accidents between January 1 and October 31, ¶2006. This carnage has continued in November. Based on press reports alone, Embassy is aware of 10 coal mine accidents in November, resulting in at least 204 deaths, and 73 missing workers. In six of these cases, the mines either had no operating license or had been ordered closed before the accident but nonetheless were still in operation. Three cases occurred when mine operators ignored high gas levels and continued production in violation of standard safety procedures. Following Central Government investigations, local governments arrested mine owners in only 3 cases. Mine owners fled in four cases.

¶2. (U) SAWS Minister Li Yizhong and other senior SAWS officials have made unusually blunt and public comments about collusion between local governments and unscrupulous mine owners in mine disasters. In transcripts of a government teleconference among mine safety officials, cited in the press, an agitated Li complained that "local governments were willfully flouting national safety regulations." He asked how many lives need to be lost before mine owners learn not to continue operations in the presence of high levels of gas, and pledged that government officials and agencies that help cover up the true state of small coal mines would be severely punished. With regard to the November 25 gas explosion at the Changyuan coal mine in Yunnan Province, which killed 32 miners and injured 28, Li accused local governments, who kept the mine open -- after SAWS ordered it closed in August 2006 -- by closing other mines instead, of "fraud," of "backing" unscrupulous mine owners, and of "challenging the authority of the Central Government."

13. (SBU) On November 30, Laboff asked a SAWS mine safety official whether the recent press attention to mine disasters, and SAWS' recent candid, public comments, presaged a central government crackdown on corrupt local government officials. The SAWS official said that Li's comments reflect frustration after two years of working hard to improve China's mine safety record. The official is not aware of any imminent crackdown or major regulatory changes in the works, but said that some corrupt officials will definitely be punished.

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